

After you get the smallpox vaccine.... Protecting Pets and Other Animals

About the Smallpox Vaccine:

The smallpox vaccine does not contain smallpox. It contains a much less harmful virus called vaccinia, which can protect people from smallpox.

If you receive a smallpox vaccination, it is important to care for the vaccination site properly. Until the vaccination site has completely healed and the scab has fallen off, usually in about three weeks, proper management of the vaccination site will prevent the spread of the vaccinia virus to other parts of your body or to others who come in close contact with you. Some pets and other animals may also be susceptible to the vaccinia virus. A few simple precautions will minimize the chance of spreading the virus to them as well.

Protecting Pets and Other Animals:

Different animals may have varying risks of illness from exposure to the vaccinia virus. The best way to protect all pets and other animals is to follow the guidelines below after you have been vaccinated.

- The most important thing you can do is to always wash your hands after touching the vaccination site, or other things that have touched the site, such as bandages or clothing.
- Do not let animals sniff or have any direct contact with your vaccination site.
- Do not let animals have any contact with the bandages, clothing, towels, sheets, or other materials that have touched the vaccination site or the scab.
- Keep pets out of the room when you are changing your bandages.
- Before allowing your pet back into the room after you have changed your bandage, handle and dispose of all contaminated materials safely:
- Place used bandages and gauze in a plastic bag before throwing them away. You should do the same with your scab when it falls off.
- Cover trash containers tightly, and take them to an area that pets and rodents cannot get into.
- Use normal laundering (hot water with bleach and detergent) to wash clothing, towels or sheets that have touched the vaccination site.
- Wash your hands after touching the vaccination site and before touching anything else, including your eyes, skin or pets.
- Before handling small pets such as guinea pigs, hamsters, and other rodents, make sure your vaccination site is bandaged and your hands are washed. Do not allow animals to crawl up your sleeve or have access to the skin area around your bandage.
- People who care for livestock should wear long-sleeved shirts and wash their hands before milking or having contact with the animals, or equipment such as bridles and buckets.

Once your scab falls off, in approximately three weeks, you are no longer infectious.

For more information on smallpox and the smallpox vaccine, visit the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) website at www.mass.gov/dph, or call the MDPH smallpox information line at 888-658-2850.

Adapted from Washington State Department of Health, February 2003